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Chapter 22

Nancy Harding

Jacques-Marie-Émile **Lacan**

If you're doing your job and delivering on things it's almost like it feels like you get to a certain point and you get a tap on the shoulder by the organization It's almost like the organization is taking a view as to when you're ready for that next step every step of the way really. Or it certainly feels like that to me ... it certainly feels like the organization is kind of keeping an eye on me.

(Middle manager talking about the implementation of talent management, in Harding, Lee and Ford [in review])

What is this 'organization' that can both keep an eye on managers and tap them on the shoulder? To this speaker it appears to be an independent, anthropomorphised entity. In this chapter I explore the contribution of Lacanian theory to understanding how speaker and this (seeming) entity with an eye and a finger co-emerge. Lacanian theory illuminates how the unconscious and 'organization' are inevitably and caught up in each other. Lacan took Freud's theories, subjected them to an inspirational re-reading, and thus contributed in a major way to poststructuralist theory.

Organization studies (OS) came late to reading Lacan compared with other disciplines, but a substantial and growing body of work now interprets various aspects of organizational life through a Lacanian lens. These include, for example, studies of entrepreneurship (Jones and Spicer, 2005); identity (Driver, 2009); power and resistance (Roberts, 2005); embodied subjectivity (Driver, 2008), envy (Vidaillet, 2007); organizational burnout (Vanheule and Verhaeghe, 2004; Vanheule et al., 2003); organizational dynamics (Arnaud, 2002); public administration (McSwite, 1997; Fotaki, 2009). A special issue of the journal *Organization* (2010) applied Lacanian ideas of desire, enjoyment and lack to organizational issues; an edited book explores Lacan in more depth (Cederstrom and Hoedemaekers, [Eds.] 2010). Finally, there has been a limited application of Lacan's thesis on gender (Kenny, 2009; Fotaki and Harding, 2012). There has as yet been little exploration of the potential of Lacanian theory for process theories of organizations (see Harding, 2007, for an early attempt).

Feminist and Marxist theorists were the first to use Lacanian ideas in the English-speaking world. Žižek's interpretation, popular in Lacanian organization studies, is the most influential reading in Marxist-Lacanian theory. My own interest in Lacan's work was stimulated by Judith Butler's guarded and critical application of his work to her thesis on the performative constitution of the (gendered) subject (1990; 1993). I therefore approached Lacan via gender theorists' interpretations, readings that deviate in some important ways from those inspired by Žižek. My understanding of Lacan therefore has a somewhat different focus from that of scholars schooled in a Žižekian interpretation, in

which the concept of the phallus is largely conspicuous by its (apparent) absence. Lacanian organization theory is influenced largely by his notions of lack/desire/jouissance, with the three registers of the Symbolic, Imaginary and the Real influential to a greater or lesser extent (these are defined and discussed below). Feminist interpretations are dominated by Lacan's theory of sexuation (Lacan, 1982; 1998a), the Gaze (of the Other) (see, especially, the seminal (sic) paper by Laura Mulvey, 1975) and, of course, a critique of his (seeming) elevation of the Phallus (see Fotaki and Harding, 2013, for a discussion) to the position of that which determines what can and cannot be spoken. There is much in feminist readings of Lacan that is yet to be taken up by organization theorists, such as his five theses on aggression (see Brennan, 1993).

It is perhaps not surprising that Lacanian theorists should find different lode-bearing seams in his work because his style of argumentation was obscure and open to multiple interpretations. His seminars (in contrast to his *Ecrits*) come to us via notes and summaries made by listeners; his ideas evolved throughout his long career; and Lacan was not consistent in the use of his own terms. Most importantly, Lacan aimed to explore unconscious wishes and desires that are, by definition, outside of language: how then can they be described in language? Lacan's answer was that language should echo in some ways the manner in which the unconscious functions, hence his use of a convoluted style of writing, one that is 'psychotic' (Benvenuto and Kennedy, 1986), and full of puns, obscure or hidden references, double meanings and so on. He wished that this style would encourage listeners and readers to engage with a text as if in a therapy session where limitations of meaning are confronted. Thus to read Lacan requires that one explore the effect the language has upon the self as it reads (Homer, 2005) and thus engage in an intense reflection upon the self.

Relatedly, to use Lacan's name as a fount of authority is to contradict Lacan's teachings concerning, variously, the name-of-the-Father¹, the subject-supposed-to-know², the discourses of the university and the master³, the phallus's⁴ claim to be the master signifier, and so on. We must not claim to be a 'true' interpreter of his texts because that would be to attempt to dictate what knowledge *is* and what can be knowable. Lacan warned against such an endeavour.

¹ A symbolic position of authority and the (symbolic) law. The law is something we desire to transgress, and it is that desire which is the precondition for the law itself.

² The person who supposedly has absolute and certain knowledge of one's innermost secrets.

³ In *Seminar XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan (2007) outlines the schemata of four discourses constitutive of the social order: the university, master, hysteric and analyst. These produce the four fundamental social effects of educating/indoctrinating; governing/brainwashing; desiring/protesting and analyzing/revolutionizing (Bracher, 1994).

⁴ The phallus should not be confused with the penis: it is a privileged signifier that inaugurates the process of signification and anchors the chain of signification. It is fundamental to *lack*, in that it signifies an object of desire that we have lost and constantly search for, although we actually never had it in the first place.

What follows therefore must be a singular interpretation, one that inevitably says as much about the chapter's author as she attempts to say about Lacan. Marianna Fotaki and I have explored feminist interpretations of Lacan in a paper whose first version railed against Lacanian organization theorists' attempt dictate a singular reading and thus to wield for themselves the power of the phallus (the master signifier, that dictates what is speakable). Wise reviewers pointed out that we were doing that very thing ourselves, i.e. dictating how Lacan *should* be read. To avoid this we found we needed to occupy the position of the hysteric⁵ (Fotaki and Harding, 2012). This chapter therefore is avowedly hysterical, a hysteria arising in part from having to use the discourses of the master and the university ('this is how Lacan *must be* read') in order to write about Lacan for an Oxford Handbook.

I will next give a brief overview of Lacan's life, provide a somewhat superficial summary of his work, and then delve more deeply into some of the major aspects of his oeuvre. That returns us to the speaker whose words opened this chapter, who speaks for all of us in our desire to be recognised by a fantasised Other upon which we put the label 'organization'. I use a reflexive perspective, exploring how working on this paper co-constitutes both self and 'university', that is, *two* 'fluid, amorphous, social phenomena in space-time' that are 'an indistinguishable mass of vague interactions and experiences' (Chia, 1998:4) operating at both conscious and unconscious levels.

Lacan: a Masculine Speaking Subject

Jacques-Marie-Èmile Lacan (1901-1981) was a hugely controversial Parisian psychoanalyst who attracted both adulation and loathing, and scandal and crisis. He was regarded by some as a guru and by others as a charlatan. From a comfortable, middle-class, Catholic background, he developed a passion for philosophy while still at school. Trained as a psychiatrist, in the 1930s he encountered both surrealism and the works of Sigmund Freud; their joint influence led him to profoundly change his work. Presumed to be politically left-wing, he voiced support for the student demonstrations of 1968 but later warned that revolutions led to nothing more than the replacement of one master with another.

Lacan's work is often divided between the early phase (up to 1953) and a mature phase from 1953 until his death. It was in 1953 that Lacan was elected president of the Société Française de Psychanalyse (SPF), and in the same year he started giving the seminars in which he outlined his ideas to an audience that eventually grew to 1000 participants and included intellectual celebrities. In 1963 Lacan was banned from the SPF, which wanted membership of the International Psychoanalytic Association, a desire that could be fulfilled only if the controversial Lacan was removed. He founded his own study group that grew to become the L'École Freudienne de Paris, and at the invitation of Louis Althusser set up a base at École Normale Supérieure. Always controversial, but hugely

⁵ The hysteric's discourse is that of a subject who refuses to take up the positions available to her/him through language even though desiring to occupy those very subject positions it refuses

popular, he dissolved L'Ecole in 1980 because, in his view, it had become too Lacanian and had lost its Freudian roots.

Throughout, Lacan followed his aim of returning to Freud, re-reading his works through such disciplines as philosophy (notably Plato, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger), mathematics, and, most influentially, anthropology (Levi-Strauss) and linguistics (Saussure). Saussure's influence led to Lacan's best-known formula that 'The unconscious is structured as a language' (Žižek, 2006:3). The unconscious, in this formulation, is not the repository of irrational instincts but something that talks and thinks, using its own grammar and logic (ibid). It is not located 'inside' individuals but is the effect upon subjects of a trans-individual symbolic order (Homer, 2004:69).

How may management and organization theorists approach Lacan: as a psychoanalyst or a philosopher? We undoubtedly cannot use his ideas to undertake therapy with/in organizations, but we can use his ideas *theoretically* (Frosh, 2010), as a form of 'wild philosophy' (Bond, 2009), or indeed as a historian of the ego's era (Brennan, 1993). Lacan *qua* philosopher explores how 'reality' is constituted, notably through the effects of speech and language on the human condition (Nobus, 2000:xiii).

For Nobus (2000), Lacan's work has a global theoretical framework that must be understood before any of the other aspects of his writings can be grasped. I will firstly, writing from the position of the hysteric, summarise this framework in the form of a story. One cannot sustain one's self within only one of Lacan's four discourses: later in the paper I will inevitably circle back through the discourses of the master and the university – attempting to dictate how Lacan *should* be understood (Fotaki and Harding, 2012).

The everyday tragedy of being a subject: a Lacanian (Bad Fairy) Tale

A baby is born. It is nothing but a sea of consciousness (J. Klein, 1987) filled with demands, dread and desires. It does not recognise that its care-takers are separate from itself, it is unaware of any boundaries to its body, even that it has a body. All there is are sensations. (Let's call this the Real: a place outside language, where there are no signifiers, signifieds or signs.) Slowly, slowly, it starts to identify the linkages between signifier, signified and sign – it is entering the Symbolic, where signs and symbols exist that allow objects to be named. But there is as yet no sense of self, no boundaries between a not-yet-emerged 'I/me' and others. Until one day, the child, perhaps struggling to pull itself to its feet, sees its image reflected in a mirror or in another person's face and recognises itself. That is **ME!!!** There is jubilation. I exist as an I. But of course that I does not exist – it is a mirror image, a not-me. But the child *imagines* it is an I or a me. This is the Imaginary: I believe I am a whole person; that there is an 'I' that exists. This is a sexed I or me – but the sex that I am is imposed on me from outside, and I have to learn how to constitute a self that can pass as a male or a female speaking subject.

But the subject is troubled: that 'me' is outside 'me' (in the mirror) so who therefore is in here, inside, who is this I? What happened to that wonderful sense, before I had language, that I was complete, whole? Now begins a life-long process of desiring something I can never find, something I lost when I entered

the Symbolic even though I had not possessed it before losing it, and whose absence leaves me with a fundamental sense of lack. I know neither what I desire nor what I lack, I know only a constant, unquenchable desire for something I must seek, my *objet petit a*⁶. But the purpose of my desire is desire itself, because without a desire that propels me forward I cease to exist.

I thus work at constructing a self, one that consists of an ideal ego or the self I would like to be, but I also construct an ego-ideal, a big Other⁷, that I try to impress. I always fail in this endeavour of impressing that Other because of the intervention of my superego, or the Other in its revengeful, sadistic and punishing aspect. I try to please it but do not know what it wants. I am judged: a voice constantly whispers in my ear, coming at me from outside, from the big Other, that tells me how inadequate I am. I desire to be a fantasised, imaginary, ideal self, but I am a subject linked to the symbolic so I can never be that person I yearn to be.

This Lacanian tale is of a subject that ceaselessly works on itself to construct a self that is impossible to construct. It has many affinities with process theories of organizations: we see fantasised selves in fantasised locations. This is where I, as hysteric, come up against myself. I recognise that ‘the organization’ has no existence as such, but at the same time I desire its recognition of me so that I can know of my own existence.

But the ratchet turns and the hysteric is overcome by the Master and the University – rather than outlining a bad fairy tale, I turn now to exploring in a more ‘philosophical’ way some major aspects of Lacan’s work. For each, I will explore one ‘seminal’ paper from organization studies that relates Lacan’s ideas to organizations.

The three registers of the Imaginary, Symbolic and the Real

Lacan’s early work focused on the Imaginary, his attention switching to the Symbolic in the decade following delivery of the Rome Report in 1953, with the Real a third term whose role and definition changed over the years. Although ‘profoundly heterogenous’ they were linked together by Lacan in a seminar in 1974/5 (Sheridan, Translator’s Note, in Lacan, 1998b).

The Imaginary

⁶ *Objet petit a* is, in Homer’s words (2004:87), that sense upon achieving our goals, that there is always something more that we should have experienced but we do not know what it is. The *objet petit a* is not that object; it is the function that masks the lack.

⁷ For Lacan, the big Other is the symbolic order, that always-already there to which I must conform if I am to have being. The unconscious is the effect of the symbolic order upon the subject. The little other (lower case ‘o’) refers to other people: we presume that they are unified, coherent and whole but because every subject is a subject of lack, other people are imaginary others.

The imaginary register is first encountered in the 'mirror stage' of the child's development, but continues to inform subjectivities throughout life. The mirror stage is an 'identification', that is, 'the transformation that takes place in a subject when he assumes an image' (Lacan, 1977:2). Only seven pages long, this lecture is worth exploring in depth.

Lacan discusses a young infant who cannot yet walk, stand or even sit up unaided, and who, unaware of a body as such and thus incapable of motor coordination, feels animated by turbulent movements. But the infant sees its reflection and experiences jubilation as it recognises its self as an I. This form would have to be called the Ideal-I, Lacan writes (1977:2) but

'this form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will only rejoin the coming-into-being) (*le devenir*) of the subject asymptotically, whatever the success of the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve as I his discordance with his own reality' (p.2).

That is, the image reflected back at the infant is a fictional one – giving the impression of a whole, coordinated subject with which the infant can identify, an impression that belies the infant's then reality (she cannot stand unaided). This fiction or 'mirage' of a whole self will inform the subject throughout its life. Importantly, the infant has found itself outside its self, in a form that is 'certainly more constituent than constituted' (p.2). This *Gestalt*, this mirage, 'symbolizes the mental permanence of the I, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination' (p.2) within a

'temporal dialectic [that] decisively projects the formation of the individual into history. The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic – and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development' (1977: 4).

At the end of the mirror stage the 'specular I' is deflected into the 'social I' (Lacan, 1977:5), inaugurating 'a dialectic that will henceforth link the I to socially elaborated situations' (Lacan, 1977:5). Hegel's master/slave dialectic is influential here: the specular I seeks acknowledgement of itself 'through the desire of the other' (p.5) (that is, it seeks the reliving of that inaugurative jubilation when it first recognised itself), but because this I is alienated, is outside itself, it is aggressive to the other (p.6) because of an 'imaginary servitude' to the other (p.7).

Exemplary in organization studies' use of the Imaginary is perhaps Roberts' (2005) thesis that through the Imaginary I identify both with the gaze of the Other that (I imagine) looks at me, and the self I imagine myself to be. The Imaginary instigates that desire for control (over the other) that informs managerial practices. This is because 'the narcissistic identification with the gaze of the other – the seeking and finding of myself in the gaze of the other – serves as an explanation of the dynamics of both love and aggression' (p. 631).

I need the desire of the other if I am to exist, but because I am dependent on that gaze I also hate that desire. With regard to organizations, Roberts suggests we have a fantasised organizational ideal that we cannot live up to, so we berate ourselves: 'The ideal provides the ground with which conscience can be turned aggressively back upon the self' (p. 636). This is the very organization to which we look for recognition, and thus selfhood, so to feel ourselves denied that recognition is to feel despair. It necessitates a 'strong interest' in controlling both self and others, such that the social becomes a 'domain solely of a struggle for control in the interests of the ego' (p. 637). We are thus vulnerable to organizational mechanisms of disciplinary power. Only through letting go of the ego, of the self we are striving to be(come), can we resist organizational demands.

At its simplest level, the organization, in the Imaginary, can be regarded as a fantasy that has great power over the subject. As a fantasy it exists only in the psyche, but in that location it allows identification and making of an agonistic self.

The Symbolic

In contrast to Lacan's neat summary of the imaginary in one lecture, his development of the theory of the Symbolic is dotted throughout several seminars beginning with the Rome seminar of 1953 (Lacan, 1999). Now the influence of Levi-Strauss and Saussure are palpable. Frustration follows any desire to summarise 'the Symbolic' or grasp its meaning: the Rome seminar is long and discursive. But let us start at p. 65, where Lacan states that 'it is the world of words that creates the world of things', so that 'Man speaks, then, but it is because the symbol has made him man'. A discussion of the laws of kinship and reference to the Oedipus complex then leads Lacan to write that 'what the subject can know of his unconscious participation in the movement of the complex structures of marriage ties, by verifying the symbolic effects in his individual existence of the tangential movement towards incest that has manifested itself ever since the coming of a universal community' (66). This leads to a statement on p. 67 that 'It is in the *name of the* father that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified this person with the figure of the law' (emphasis in original). He points out that the subject would be 'annihilated' under the weight of such huge pressures 'if desire did not preserve its part in the interferences and pulsations that the cycles of language cause to converge on him' (68). Such that

'what is at stake in an analysis is the advent in the subject of that little reality that this desire sustains in him with respect to the symbolic conflicts and imaginary fixations as the means of their agreement' // From this point on it will be seen that the problem is that of the relations between speech and language in the subject' (68).

In a few brief passages Lacan therefore specifies language as symbols that constitute subjects within historico-cultural settings, but these are subjects necessarily driven by desire that is not only instigated by the symbolic but will sustain that symbolic. An added complication is the distinction between speech and language. I could spend this entire chapter analysing these four pages, especially as (for current purposes) they hint at ways in which to understand how individuals are caught up in the propulsion that constitutes 'the organization'. No doubt my interpretation would differ from other readers – the

quotes given illuminate the struggles and intellectual frissons experienced when attempting to engage with Lacan's work, but also how Lacan's language is mimetic of an analytical encounter - we have to do hard work in order to develop understanding so each person's unconscious influences their reading.

There is surprisingly little discussion of the Symbolic in Lacanian MOS. Stavrakis (2008) discusses it briefly. It is, he writes, a network into which we are born that has a far more important structuring role than the imaginary. We must submit to it because only through submitting to the laws of language can we become subjects: we inhabit and are inhabited by language (p. 1044). The laws of language are symbolic Law, embodied by the Name-of-the-Father, or the agent of symbolic castration. Castration is that which occurs on entering into language – the subject is radically split between a replete-ness, a captivating *jouissance*⁸ it experienced outside language, and the never-finished self that emerges within the symbolic. But the Other (the symbolic) cannot fulfil that lack, and indeed produces it, so the Other is also a lacking Other. However, Stavrakakis (2008) argues, subjects are willing to do whatever may be necessary to repress or disavow the lack in the Other (1045). Willing to subordinate themselves within conditions of voluntary servitude, subjectification within the Symbolic produces organizational subjects riven in two, suffering lack, and colluding in their own abjection.

The Real

The real, apparent in Lacan's work in the 1950s, became increasingly important in succeeding decades. Its meaning and position shifted until it became the central category in Lacan's late work. Reality and 'the real' are very different concepts: 'reality' is associated with the symbolic order; whereas the *real* is that unsymbolisable something that exists at the symbolic's limit. The *real* both undermines symbolic reality and makes it possible. Lacan understood the real in the 1950s as an undifferentiated mass that precedes language, but later argued that its being outside the symbolic renders definition impossible; suffice it to say that it is associated with trauma, or pain that cannot be put into language (Homer, 2004).

Related to the *real* are fantasy, lack and *jouissance*. Fantasy includes daydreams and foundational myths that structure psychic life (e.g. the 'fact' of two distinct sexes; the 'fact' that managers and staff are distinct). The subject attempts to cover over its constitutive lack through attempts at identification, its *desire* to be. This negative ontology of lack explains why the lacking subject desires its subjection (Stavrakakis, 2008), an observation of importance for understanding the investment made when identifying with organizations. *Objet petit a* is the left-over of the real: although it escapes symbolisation and cannot be represented, it is a feeling that bridges the

⁸ Stavrikakis (2010) defines *jouissance* as 'enjoyment', contradicting Lacan's account of something murkier. It is defined elsewhere as 'a sacrifice made at the altar of more or less obscure gods; it is the malefic jouissance of stripping the other of the goods he holds dear. Jouissance appears in guilt, in remorse, in confession, in contrition, more in paying than in being paid, in destroying more than in conserving (Braunstein, 2003, p. 108)

unconscious and the symbolic; it is that thing desired and striven for in the unconscious belief that once found we will become whole. A cornerstone of Lacan's work (Braunstein, 2003), *jouissance* is as difficult to define as lack and the *real*. To translate it as 'enjoyment' radically simplifies a concept that incorporates pain as much as pleasure, that is, pleasure that can be found through pain. Braunstein, (2003: 104), defining it as 'a "something" lived by a body when pleasure stops being pleasure. It is a plus, a sensation that is beyond pleasure', suggests that *jouissance* is a letting go of the ego, or, in Hegel's terms, a forgetting of one's self in the object.

'Desire points towards a lost and absent object; it is lack in being, and the craving for fulfilment in the encounter with the lost object. Its concrete expression is the fantasy. Jouissance, on the other hand, does not point to anything, nor does it service any purpose whatsoever; [D]esire, phantasy, and pleasure are barriers on the way to jouissance.

Lack and the *real* have been drawn on in some depth by organization theorists since Jones and Spicer's (2005) paper. Jones and Spicer argue that entrepreneurship discourse 'is a paradoxical, incomplete and worm-ridden symbolic structure that posits an impossible and indeed incomprehensible object at its centre' (p.236), and so 'offers a narrative structure to the fantasy that coordinates desire' (p.237). They argue that this impossible desire enlists entrepreneurs and reproduces economic domination (ibid). The author whose development of Lacanian lack for organization studies is most fruitful is Michaela Driver who, in a series of papers, has attempted to rescue Lacan from his profound pessimism. In 2009, for example, she explored lack and identity, arguing that although 'in the end, there is only lack and the ever-present nothingness of work, organization, and self it is also precisely this lack that holds much potential for empowerment and liberation' (Driver, 2009:57). Organizational identity discourses, she argues, are imaginary constructions that invariably fail (p. 65). Because of that failure and the revelation of lack that is revealed, subjects are liberated to 'engage in liberating struggles with lack' (p. 66). That is, they are able to experiment with identities beyond those deemed permissible by the organization. Failure to define who we are allows us to be alive and creative, she argues powerfully. That is, by resisting identification *with* the organization, we may find spaces of freedom in which to constitute other identities.

Summary: the Lacanian subject in/of organizations

The Lacanian subject is, in short, a desiring subject for whom satisfaction is impossible, but whose search for the lost object that might provide satisfaction propels the subject forward. This subject identifies with that which appears to offer the potential to fulfil its desire (to be), to overcome its lack. 'The' organization is a site where that dialectic of desire/lack is articulated, opening the subject to domination by the organizational Big Other, albeit that the Organizational Big Other does not exist. In Lacanian terms, 'the organization' is imaginary; it is 'a master signifier that draws together a field of signification, notwithstanding its own vacuity' (Owens, 2010, p. 187). The Organizational Big Other promises fulfilment of the desire for being, but what is experienced is a failure of the self to become the ideal subject that the subject imagines s/he is required by the organization to be.

That is I am sitting in my study in my house in the north of England working on this chapter. I seem to be alone, but as I read and write I gesture towards an Organizational Big Other for evidence of my identity as 'academic'. The 'organization' takes the shape of a fantasised readership of the chapter: I want their approval even though I cannot envisage who they might be. The university that pays my salary and provides students I try to teach is also here as I type: this chapter will be included in my 'outputs' for this year and that 'organization' therefore informs my thoughts. If I gain their approval I will know that I am 'an academic'. Just like the speaker whose words opened this chapter, I am waiting for a tap on the shoulder that says 'hey, excellent chapter – the best thing yet written on Lacan and organizations'. Previous experience has taught me not only how futile is this fantasy, but also how everything I write is just not good enough. I write a paper or, more rarely, a book, occasionally see one accepted and published, but each time that paper or book is not the text I had envisaged: it lacks something, I must keep on writing, trying to produce the work that encapsulates what I need to say, one that will give me recognition of myself as a successful academic, a great thinker, a fantastic interpreter of ideas. I am driven to keep on reading and writing: I read, I write, I answer emails, I think. My fantasised university, the 'object' to which I refer when I think about my job, emerges out of all these activities and those of other employees, just as we emerge out of our identities as 'academics'. I refer to it by a name that performatively constitutes it – requiring its existence so that I know of my own existence. By existing as employee ('my identity') and acting in the required manner, the object of my desire appears to be there before me – 'an' organization that offers the (fallacious) opportunity for wholeness, a filling in of that lack. Isolated at my desk, the Organizational Big Other is threaded within my psyche, part of me just as I am part of 'it', that object whose desire I require. Just as Lacanian organization theorists have argued that lack drives others in pursuit of their desire - to be an entrepreneur, to manage staff, to purchase fashion products, etc – so too does lack inform the psyche of the subject who would be an academic.

Before expanding on the implications for process theories of organizations, I must make a detour via Lacan's thesis on gender.

Lacan and process theories of organizations: a detour via Seminar XX on Feminine Sexuality

Lacan's understanding of the subject as a being in process that has marked affinities to 'the organization' as process. To paraphrase Lacan's (1982) notorious statement about 'the woman': there is no such thing as 'the' organization, the 'the' is barred, its facticity is a mirage arising from desire and lack. Psyches, bodies, places, artefacts, policies, rules, and so on, interweave and collapse into each other in an imbrication that seems to take place 'in' something that is actually produced through that imbrication. Given that gender is fundamental to, in the sense that it precedes, culture (and thus organizations), then it is a gendered imbrication of names/selves/objects/places that 'produce' gendered organizations that 'produce' gendered organizational selves. Lacanian organizational

process theory therefore requires⁹ understanding of how it is that organizations are constituted as a *masculine* Big Other, as places in which emotions must be subordinated beneath rationality (Adler, Laney and Packer, 1993; Mills, 1992). They are places in which the (masculine) pervert's desire for control (Copjec, 2004) is unleashed.

In psychoanalytical theory, one cannot *be* unless one accedes to a gendered identity. Lacan argued in Seminar XX (1982/1998) that gender is neither biological nor social, but is a choice imposed on the subject: 'there is nothing by which the subject may situate himself as a male or female being' (Lacan, 1998a: 204). Mitchell and Rose (1982) translate Lacan as saying that sexual difference is 'a legislative divide which creates and reproduces its categories' (1982: 41). In Lacan, Rose and Mitchell (1982: 29) write, we see an account of 'the fictional nature of the sexual category to which every human subject is ... assigned'. Thus 'male' and 'female' are notions emerging out of fantasy (33). The 'feminine', it follows, 'is constituted as a division in language, a division which produces the feminine as its negative term'. If woman is defined as other it is because the definition produces her as other. The emancipatory potential of Lacan's arguments, Rose suggests, lies in seeing that the male, like the female, is subjected within the symbolic order. Lacan's work, in this interpretation, exposes the 'fundamental imposture' used in the subordination of the female (Campbell, 2004). Lacan's thesis on gender has been hotly contested by feminist thinkers (see Fotaki and Harding, 2012, for a discussion), but for present purposes the arguments from Seminar XX that gender is not determined but is fluid and flexible, and that male and female speaking subjects need not necessarily have male or female biology, is sufficient to inform the present discussion.

A (but not 'the') Lacanian process theory of organizations: from the hysteric to the (perverted) master

What is striking in much Lacanian organization studies is an absence of reflexivity, despite his admonition (noted above) that to read his texts is to engage in self-analysis. As Woźniak (2010:396) puts it, researchers 'who apply psychoanalysis are also its subject and as such they become an effect of language, distinct from a biological individual'. Authors use Lacan, for example, to theorise the absence of resistance towards management, yet do not ask themselves if the desire for evidence of resistance is *their* desire projected onto a fantasised other – 'the workforce'. To explore lack is to interrogate one's own lack, surely? Should not we who attempt to interpret organizations through a Lacanian lens acknowledge ourselves as inevitably implicated in the symbolic, imaginary and real? Does our failure to do so reveal that we are attempting not only to occupy the place of the master, but also our secret desire to possess the phallus and thus to dictate what can be said and thought (the discourse of the university)? That is, in reading numerous texts on Lacan while writing this chapter I have hoped they would fulfil my illusory desire that I could write a perfect text, one that lacks nothing (a desire to fill that hole in my being through writing). But I have wondered why some papers were accepted for publication: couldn't reviewers see the poverty of application traducing of Lacan's ideas? The 'why' bespeaks the position of the hysteric; I want to publish on

⁹ Note the imperative in this statement – 'requires'. This is the discourse of the master.

Lacan, I want to join this special club but its weaknesses mean it is a club I do not wish to join – unless that is I can change the terms of the debate. If so, then I am dictating how to approach Lacan: welcome to the house of the master (again). *And so the Organizational Big Other constitutes 'me' even as I constitute 'it' through my fantasy of what it requires me to do – to cogently critique others' work even as I build on what they have done.*

In other words, I see in Lacanian organization studies and my own position in writing this text a Lacanian process theory of organizations in action.

To develop this thesis I turn now to another reading of Lacan from gender studies. Freud and Lacan turned to Sophocles ancient tragedies for understanding of the modern psyche, Freud to Oedipus and Lacan, like many philosophers, to Oedipus's daughter/sister, Antigone. Copjec (2004) has developed Lacan's interpretation in a way that can inform our understanding of the co-emergence of subject and Organizational Big Other. Antigone is the daughter of the incestuous relationship between Oedipus and his mother, Jocasta. She breaks a law that the body of her slain brother shall not be buried. Discovered, arrested and taken to King Creon, her uncle, she is condemned to the slow death of entombment in a cave. Antigone hangs herself, and Creon's wife and son commit suicide as a result. Copjec's interpretation shows the impossibility of either resisting or conforming with the Organizational Big Other.

For Copjec (2004) Creon, the king, is driven by his superego to pursue an ideal that is utterly unattainable; he is nostalgic for something he has never possessed. This lost object, Copjec shows, is possession of the place of the Big Other, a place that promises a self-assurance that comes from knowing one can dictate what others should do, and the correctness of one's every diktat. But in seeking utter control over its world the ego has to fulfil the desires of an imaginary Other. Those desires must be guessed at but, crucially, the masculine position claims to know what they are. The (masculine) subject who, like Creon, places himself in the position of the big Other, of the Law, is then charged with upholding the (imagined) desire of this masculine organisation.

Meanwhile, Antigone gives herself her own law, a law that needs validation from no other authority: the Other is non-existent for her (Copjec, 2004, p. 42). Crucially, Antigone has been able to 'unloose herself from the fundamental law of her own being' (p., 43) through refusing the Symbolic. This means that she cannot live. Antigone, the female position, demonstrates the impossibility of refusing to conform to organisational laws – to refuse is to lose one's identity.

Applying *the Antigone* to organizational process theory through a Lacanian lens suggests we collectively interpret the symbolic laws of the Organizational Big Other as desiring that we become masculine speaking subjects who aggressively pursue the right to dictate what others may say and do. If we cannot do this then we are threatened with non-existence (or reduction to the position of the feminine). To fulfil the fantasies of what the fantasised organization desires of us, we attempt to constitute selves that exhibit the harshest, bleakest form of controlling masculinity; and we constitute an organization in that very image, one that limits what can be said, thought, done and felt. The discourses of the university and the master dominate. In arriving at this conclusion, I too dictate how to read Lacan so as to understand organizations.

A Lacanian process theory of 'the organization' is therefore an interpretation of how a fantasy controls thoughts, deeds and actions. This trans-individual fantasy articulates the vulnerability of subjects whose desire for existence and a yearning need to feel whole facilitates the emergence of 'the organization'. However, the masculine object that exists in fantasy mitigates against conscious, let alone unconscious, feelings of wholeness.

But on reading through this draft I know there is something wrong with this text, although I cannot put my finger on it at the moment. Now if I tear it up and start again, perhaps I can make it better: perhaps I can write that perfect account of how Lacan might better help us understand organizations

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